



ROMANI GROUPS IN RUSSIA

Kelderarja	Kirimlides	Kišinjavcurja	Litovska Roma
Lotfitka Roma	Lovara	Plaščuni	Polska Roma
Servurja	Ursarja	Vlaxurja	Xaladytka Roma

3.0

III. 1

Romani groups in Russia, according to Tcherenkov and Laederich (2004: 323-325).

# Romani groups

compiled by the editors

In recent years the name Roma, which is the ethno-cultural self-designation of most of those perceived by outsiders as 'Gypsies', has come to dominate the official political discourse, at least in Europe, and has acquired the legitimacy of political correctness. It is a complicated undertaking to further differentiate between the various Romani subgroups spread all over Europe and the world. Yet, it is also an important undertaking if we are to develop a better understanding of Roma as a variety of different groups, families and individuals, in contrast to dominant views of Roma all too often portraying them as one homogenous entity.

## ROMANI IDENTITY

The non-Romani society, for whom all the 'Gypsies' tend to be the same and who in their laws and policies concerning Roma were most often not able to differentiate between the groups, was setting in stone the all-Romani *identity* in opposition to the *Gadže* (non-Roma). *Gadžo*, *Das* and *Gor* are the most common terms used by Roma to refer to people who are not of Romani origin. These denominations, which may include a pejorative element, do not reflect religion, nationality or ethnic affiliation. Such a strict polarisation into 'us' and 'the others' may, on the one hand, be linked to the Roma's lack of possibilities to integrate themselves into the Non-Romani society. On the other hand, it is related to a number of traditional norms separating the different social and cultural fields in order to protect the group considered one's own from the invasion by potentially threatening outsiders.

Taking a look at the history of Roma, it does not seem surprising that these borders have become almost insuperable in the course of time; according to the majority of Roma, a *Gadžo* can never become a real Rom. To be a Rom is classified as a right of birth, to become a *Gadžo*, on the other hand, is something that can be learnt. The mostly negative image of Non-Roma is expressed in a very clear way, especially in literature and within the oral narrative tradition of Roma. It most often is a mistrusting, mocking or a despicable and partly contemptuous view. According to the stereotypes formulated by Roma, the *Gadže*'s only concern is the accumulation of possessions and the increase of their material wealth. As a consequence, *Gadže* would tend to neglect their family,

which Roma regard as the most important aspect of their life. *Gadže* thus represent an antithesis to Romani norms, rules and ideals, which is, however, not astonishing, considering the discriminating attitudes they have had to deal with in confronting dominant Non-Romani society.

In practical life, the Roma's need and wish to stress the identity of their own specific group (*amare roma* 'our Roma') in contrast to other Romani groups (*aver roma* 'other Roma') may be particularly manifest when faced with the mostly non-differentiated and negative views and treatment by Non-Romani people. Roma generally consider their own group *čače roma* (or the real Roma), in contrast to other Romani groups, which they do not want to be associated with. Yet, when it is necessary for them to identify themselves as distinctive from other Romani groups, they use a designation known and used in that area where they come into contact with those 'others'. This was the case, for instance, when 'other' Roma arrived into regions where another Romani group had already been settled over extended periods of time. The settled Roma were often well established by then in the local community and usually had good relationships with the local Non-Roma. When a different Romani group arrived, the revived antagonistic attitude towards 'Gypsies' afflicted all Roma without differentiation.

## SUBETHNIC DIVISION

The Roma are divided into a large number of sub-ethnic groups. These groups may be defined based on a combination of various cultural, social, political and/or historical aspects,

III. 2

The Romani band of Laki Farkas Jenő  
from the group of the Musician Roma, 1928.

Source: Forteapan/Farkas Jenő



III. 3

Romani women from the Vlach Romani group  
in the streets of Lučenec (Slovakia), 1959.

Source: Forteapan/ Zsanda Zsolt / photo of Vajszada Károly



such as their traditional profession (for instance, musicians, blacksmiths, cauldron makers or horse-handlers), their way of life (such as settled, itinerant or semi-itinerant), the existence or absence of specific cultural norms, values and traditions (such as the rules of purity or the Romani court), the Romani dialect and/or the major contact language shared by the group, the geographical region connected with the group, a common history or a common religion. Belonging to a Romani group means that the members of the group share the group identity and, most importantly, practice endogamy.

Romani groups are referred to by an attributive designation which is added to the ethnonym 'Roma', such as Kalderaš Roma (Cauldron-maker Roma), Ungrika Roma (Hungarian Roma), Bergitka Roma (Mountain Roma), and so on. They mostly indicate the traditional profession, religion or life-style (settled vs. itinerant) of the group, or the geographical location with which the group is associated.

It is impossible to estimate how many Romani groups exist, since groups' boundaries are negotiable over time and subject to changes as a result of historical, political, social and cultural processes. These changes may also be reflected in

the designations, for example through the modification or the appearance of a new group name.

### CONCLUSION

As we have seen, it indeed is a rather complex matter to orient oneself in regard to the specific designations of Romani subgroups. The large amount of diverse Romani groups is further complicated by the fact that one group can be called differently depending on where they are, to whom they speak, and by which other Romani groups they are surrounded. The complexity inherent in the denomination of Romani groups reflects the very fact that Roma are far from being one homogenous entity. Although they share a common place of origin and were often confronted with similarly undifferentiated and often ignorant attitudes from the side of Non-Roma, they employ a large variety of different traditions and customs, use a wide range of different dialects, exercise various professions, identify with a variety of religious beliefs, belong to different social classes, live in different countries all over the world where they are influenced by various local (non-Romani) cultural norms and values.

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